Improving Companion Animal Welfare

1. How To Improve Welfare

1.1 How To Improve Welfare

How To Improve Welfare

Hayley Walters & Jill MacKay
1.2 In This Session

In This Session

- After working through this session you will be able to:
  - Explain that behaviour can tell us about an animal's welfare.
  - Recognise some typical behaviours and their meaning in dogs and cats.
  - Identify strategies for improving companion animal welfare.
1.3 How To Improve Welfare?

How To Improve Welfare?

- To improve the welfare of our companion animals we can use a simple process.
- Click on each part of the process to go further:
  - Identify Poor Welfare
  - Identify the Cause of Poor Welfare
  - Address the Welfare Challenge
  - Finish
2. Identifying Poor Welfare

2.1 Identifying Poor Welfare

Identifying Poor Welfare in Companion Animals
2.2 What Does Behaviour Tell Us?

What Does Behaviour Tell Us?

In the next few slides you will view a short video of an animal.

You'll be asked what you think the behaviour is indicating and then you'll see an explanation of the right answer.

These questions aren't graded and won't affect your certificate.

2.3 Which dog is nervous of the person watching it?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)
Which dog is nervous of the person watching it?

Press 'play' at the bottom of each video to view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Choice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dog One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Dog Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Feedback when correct:**

Dog Two is showing behaviours that would make us think it is nervous of the person watching it.

But on the surface, it looks like it is behaving similarly to Dog One.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the subtle differences in behaviour between the two dogs.
Feedback when incorrect:

Dog Two is showing behaviours that would make us think it is nervous of the person watching it.

But on the surface, it looks like it is behaving similarly to Dog One.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the subtle differences in behaviour between the two dogs.

Correct (Slide Layer)

Which dog is nervous of the person watching it?

Correct

Dog Two is showing behaviours that would make us think it is nervous of the person watching it.

But on the surface, it looks like it is behaving similarly to Dog One.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the subtle differences in behaviour between the two dogs.
Incorrect (Slide Layer)

Which dog is nervous of the person watching it?

Incorrect

Dog Two is showing behaviours that would make us think it is nervous of the person watching it.

But on the surface, it looks like it is behaving similarly to Dog One.

Click ‘Continue’ to find out more about the subtle differences in behaviour between the two dogs.

Continue

Dog Two
2.4 What are we looking at?

To find out more about the behavioural cues, click on the buttons to view the video again.
Barking

Both dogs are barking at the person watching them. Barking alone doesn't tell us very much about what the dog is feeling.

Posture

Despite being very energetic, this dog has a fairly relaxed posture. The line of its back is fluid and it frequently moves about. In between bounces, this dog sticks its front paws out and bows its head between them. This is called a 'play bow' and is a signal dogs use to one another to say "I want to play!"

This dog may be too excited to perform the play bow properly, but there are definitely elements of it being performed.
The Tail Wag & the Eyes

Dog One is wagging its tail more than Dog Two, but this can sometimes be misleading.

The type of tail wag in relation to the posture of the dog is very important when interpreting what a wagging tail means.

Bouncing

This dog is in a high energy state - clearly very excited. High energy states can be both positive (such as joy) and negative (such as terror), so the bouncing on its own does not tell us very much, other than that the dog has a lot of energy!
Dog Two (Slide Layer)

What are we looking at?

Vocalisations & Tail Wag
Both dogs are barking and wagging their tail at the person watching them. Barking alone doesn't tell us very much about what the dog is feeling. Tail wagging can also have many different meanings so we need to take into account along with the dog's posture and other behaviours.

Posture
If you looked at this dog and thought 'it's not relaxed' but couldn't figure out why, you might be picking up on postural cues. The dog's back remains fairly rigid throughout the clip, its head doesn't move very much, and it maintains eyecontact with the watcher for the duration.

These are all indications that the animal is not relaxed.

Standing Its Ground
Unlike Dog One, this dog is not bouncing up and down. It does not look like it is about to initiate a 'play bow'. For the most part it keeps all four feet on the ground.
The Eyes Have It

Dog Two shows a lot of 'eye white', the white colour around the cornea, that is normally difficult to see in dogs. In many species, such as sheep and cows, the amount of eye white shown is a fairly good indicator of stress or discomfort. While this hasn't been studied with dogs, combined with the barking and the posture, the eye white shown here is a worrying sign.
2.5 The 'Top' Dog?

The 'Top' Dog?

Many people think that dogs need to be shown who's boss, because they think this is how wolves behave.
2.6 Dogs and Wolves

In fact this research was done on wolves in human-made packs, in captive environments and we now know it does not reflect true wolf behaviour.

We also know dogs have their own behavioural repertoire, different from wolves in many respects, such as their communication.


2.7 No Real 'Top' Dog

No Real 'Top' Dog

Now we know that dogs aren't after 'alpha' status and don't tend to show aggression for these reasons.

And dogs with appropriate training are far less likely to have behavioural problems and be relinquished to a shelter.
2.8 Which cat is relaxed around the person in this environment?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Correct Choice

Cat Two

X Cat One

Feedback when correct:

Cat One is more relaxed around the person in this environment.
Click 'Continue' to find out more about the differences in the behaviours these two cats are showing.

Feedback when incorrect:
Cat One is more relaxed around the person in this environment.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the differences in the behaviours these two cats are showing.

Correct (Slide Layer)

Which cat is relaxed around the person in this environment?

Press 'play' at the bottom of each video to view.

Correct
Cat One is more relaxed around the person in this environment.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the differences in the behaviours these two cats are showing.
Incorrect (Slide Layer)

Which cat is relaxed around the person in this environment?

Press 'play' at the bottom of each video to view.

Incorrect

Cat One is more relaxed around the person in this environment.

Click 'Continue' to find out more about the differences in the behaviours these two cats are showing.
2.9 What are we looking at?

To find out more about the behavioural cues, click on the buttons to view the video again.
Cat two (Slide Layer)

What are we looking at?

Miaow

Cat Two is vocalising quite a lot. Cats don't have a specific set of vocal calls, but their owners can learn to identify what cats want with experience (Nicastro & Owren, 2003, Classification of domestic cat (Felis catus) vocalisations by naive and experienced human listeners. Journal of Comparative Psychology 117(1), 44-52).

Unless you know a cat well it can be difficult to identify the meaning behind a particular vocalisation. Taking the other behaviours into account, this sounds like distress.

Hiding

Lots of cat baskets are enclosed and cats are very good at finding secure places to hide.

If an otherwise healthy cat chooses to hide, it is a clear sign it has no interest in being around people and should be left alone.

Averted Gaze
Cats do not tend to make eye contact. The typical 'closing eyes' that a relaxed cat shows is one instance where cats may appear to maintain eye contact as they close their eyes.

Cat Two averts its gaze from the human and even turns its head away from the offered hand. These are indicators that the cat is not comfortable with the human being so near.
Cat One (Slide Layer)

Relaxed Ears
A cat's ears are capable of moving independently to one another and can hear noises outside of our hearing range.

This cat's ears are relaxed and not particularly focussed on the person. This is an excellent sign that the cat is relaxed in the presence of the human.

Head Rubbing
When cats are comfortable in their environments they will mark it using the glands on their heads, rubbing their jaw along objects or their owners legs. The rubbing action seen here resembles this process and is another indicator that this cat feels comfortable.

The Eyes Have It
This cat frequently lowers its eyelids until they are half closed. It looks like it might be dropping off to sleep. This is a classic behaviour of a relaxed cat and a very good indicator that this cat is relaxed in the presence of the person.

**Purring**

Do you hear this cat purring?

Cats will purr in many situations, not just when they’re relaxed. There are reports of cats purring under stress, and possibly to make themselves feel better when they are ill.

However, taken into consideration along with the other behaviours, purring is a good sign here.

**No Kneading?**

Many people recognise the claw kneading motion many cats make, known in America as 'making biscuits'. It’s often said that cats do it because it reflects a kitten behaviour of stimulating milk production at the teat, but there's actually very little research confirming this!

This cat isn't showing much kneading, but the absence of one sign doesn't mean it's not relaxed.
2.10 Behaviour Can Be a Welfare Indicator

Behaviour Can Be a Welfare Indicator

Animal behaviour is one indicator we can use to assess animal welfare.

Understanding the behaviour of companion animals can help you to infer something about their welfare status.
3. Identifying Welfare Challenges

3.1 Identifying Welfare Challenges

Identifying Welfare Challenges in Companion Animals
3.2 The Cause of Poor Welfare

The Cause of Poor Welfare

- After we have recognised that animal has poor welfare, we ask WHY it has poor welfare.
- And what can be done to change this?
3.3 The Cause of Poor Welfare

The Cause of Poor Welfare

In the next few slides you will see a video where an animal is faced with a welfare challenge.

You will be asked what the cause of the welfare challenge is.

The questions are not graded and will not affect your certificate. They are to help you learn.

3.4 What is the main thing affecting this cat's welfare?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)
What is the main thing affecting this cat's welfare?

- Stress - her welfare will be good when she leaves the vets.
- Obesity - her welfare will be affected until she loses weight.
- Stress - her welfare will be affected as long as she is around humans.
- I think this cat has good welfare.

**Feedback when correct:**

This cat's obesity is her main welfare problem.
She is not behaving in a way that would make us think she is particularly stressed by being at the vets, or frightened of humans. However her obesity will cause her health problems and affect her welfare.

Correct (Slide Layer)

What is the main thing affecting this cat's welfare?

Correct

This cat’s obesity is her main welfare problem.

She is not behaving in a way that would make us think she is particularly stressed by being at the vets, or frightened of humans. However her obesity will cause her health problems and affect her welfare.

Continue
3.5 What is this cat's main welfare problem?

(Multiple Choice, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)
Improving Companion Animal Welfare
Created for the Animal Behaviour and Welfare MOOC

What is this cat's main welfare problem?

- Stress - the cat is frustrated by being kept in the vet's cage and its welfare will improve when it can be free.
- Stress - the cat is anxious of people and welfare will not improve when it is home.
- Injury - the cat is hurt and welfare will improve when it recovers.
- I think this cat has good welfare.

Correct | Choice
--- | ---
X | Stress - the cat is frustrated by being kept in the vet's cage and its welfare will improve when it can be free.

Feedback when correct:
This cat is showing some behavioural indicators of stress by pacing and being restless.
It looks otherwise healthy and is not showing pain-related behaviours, so it will likely calm down when removed from the unfamiliar environment in the vet's office.

**Feedback when incorrect:**

This cat is showing some behavioural indicators of stress by pacing and being restless.

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**Correct (Slide Layer)**

What is this cat's main welfare problem?

Correct

This cat is showing some behavioural indicators of stress by pacing and being restless.

It looks otherwise healthy and is not showing pain-related behaviours, so it will likely calm down when removed from the unfamiliar environment in the vet's office.
What is this cat's main welfare problem?

Incorrect

This cat is showing some behavioural indicators of stress by pacing and being restless.

It looks otherwise healthy and is not showing pain-related behaviours, so it will likely calm down when removed from the unfamiliar environment in the vet's office.
3.6 Welfare Challenges

Welfare Challenges

Welfare challenges can either be acute (short term) or chronic (long term).

Both can affect an animal's welfare and both types of challenge can be mitigated by understanding how they are affecting the animal.
4. Improving Welfare

4.1 Improving Welfare
4.2 Change the Welfare Challenge

Reducing the Welfare Challenge

- Now we know that there is a welfare challenge and we know what causes it, how can we improve the situation for the animal?
4.3 Simple Things Make a Big Difference!

There are lots of small things we can do which can improve the welfare of our pets.

- Enrichment
- Health
- Exercise
- Small Changes
Feeding Enrichment (Slide Layer)

**Simple Things Make a Big Difference!**

There are lots of small things we can do which can improve the welfare of our pets.

**Enrichment:**

We can still think about natural behaviours when thinking about companion animal welfare. For example dogs are natural scavengers. A bored dog’s welfare can be greatly improved by a simply toy which releases food when they play with it. Integrating this into a feeding routine can make a big difference to animal welfare.
Exercise

It's important that we give our companion animals the opportunity to exercise and to socialise. Play behaviour is usually a good indicator of good animal welfare.
Small Changes

There are many methods of improving an animal's welfare. Even when resources are limited, or a welfare challenge is short term such as a stay in a shelter, there are still many quick and easy changes that can be made. For example, giving dogs the opportunity to socialise, or providing cats with places to hide, or creating cheap toys from natural resources.

Cats are very stimulated by novelty, and this cat is enjoying playing with a blade of grass. Providing the animal with the right stimuli and the attention it needs will greatly improve welfare.
Simple Things Make a Big Difference!

There are lots of small things we can do which can improve the welfare of our pets.

- Enrichment
- Health
- Exercise
- Small Changes

Always seek a veterinary opinion if you are concerned about your animal's health or behaviour.
5. Summary

5.1 Summary

Companion animal welfare is just as important as production or wild animal welfare.

Small changes can make a big difference.
5.2 Finished!

Finished!

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5.3 About this Learning Object

About this Learning Object

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